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ABSTRACT

Active literacy is the ability to inject one's own thoughts and intentions into messages received and sent, the ability to transform and to act upon aspects of the world via the written word. Five things are not working for literacy in Australia; formularistic exercise texts and kits, the media, experts with solutions, habits, and national testing. However, the Australian Orthodoxy, a position on literacy that stresses the role of the school as a rich language workshop, is working. In order to achieve the teacher power that works for literacy, teachers must change their frame of mind along with their practice, and the projects aimed at changing the teachers' minds must practice what is preached. Two such projects, the Language and Learning Project and the National Language Development Project, led to the following conclusions: (1) effective language development begins with the teacher's own learning theory, (2) tasks and goals must be negotiated, (3) teachers must come to feel their own power to act according to their theories, (4) assessments of literacy programs must look to the enactments of the teachers in living and teaching, and (5) the locus of control of any act of learning must be with the learner. (Summary observations on universal features of literacy, literacy programs, and teacher development projects are attached.) (JL)

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THE WISDOM OF THE ANTIPODES :

WHAT'S WORKING FOR LITERACY IN AUSTRALIA

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
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A paper delivered to the 27th Annual Conference of the International Reading Association, Chicago, April 1982.

GARTH BOOMER

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INTRODUCTION

My task is to try to convey to you in useful form something of what we have been learning about literacy in Australia. I am acutely aware that the story I am about to tell is spun out of my experience and bound up with what I support and do. Obviously, I continue to support and do the things which I think are working, or will work, for literacy. As a safeguard, I have checked my story with some Australian teachers and educators whom I respect. I am encouraged by them to say what I am about to say.

You will need, first, a few brief context notes. Then I will offer a personal view of literacy, before describing some of the things which I believe are not working. This will lead me to my central assertion about what is working. The rest of the paper will expand upon and enrich that assertion by reference to specific strategies and projects. As I proceed I will attempt to draw out some key principles and generalizations. In conclusion, I will offer a modest charter of principles drawn from our experience which might be used to good effect across cultures, in the quest for literacy.

THE AUSTRALIAN CONTEXT

Australia is a continent the size of the forty-eight contiguous states of the U.S.A. It is populated by 15,000,000 people representing a very wide spectrum of cultures and living predominantly in six state capital cities dotted around the extensive coastline. It comprises six states and two territories, each state and territory with its own

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government under a federal government superstructure. Education is funded partly federally and partly by the states. State education systems are centralized and schools within each system work to centrally prepared curriculum guidelines with varying degrees of freedom to adapt, modify or reject such guidelines. Alongside the state system, there is a Catholic Education system, partly centralized, and a private system where there is loose affiliation between some schools but basic independence from outside prescription or guidelines.

The dominant culture is white European with a strong Anglo centre. The parliamentary system is British in origin. There is a very slowly growing multi-cultural perspective on life and society and a possibly slower realization that our small aboriginal population should be given back some of its land and all of its rights.

Australians, by and large, enjoy a very high standard of living but there are substantial pockets of poverty and disadvantage. Measured literacy compares favourably with similar measures in other Western countries.

The state education system of South Australia in which I work has a teaching force of about 17,000 serving some 620 primary (or elementary schools - grades1 to 7) and 150 secondary or high schools (spanning grades 8 to 12). These schools, until recently in our history, have followed central prescribed courses of instruction. Now they are required to take account of, but not necessarily to use, central guidelines. Schools have parent councils but the power of such councils is rarely used to influence basic curriculum offerings or staffing.

Many of the myths, legends and songs of Australia glorify the underdog, the outsider, the battler and the bushranger. We like to celebrate our egalitarianism but in truth we have subtle class structures based on wealth and we are owned, more than we usually care to admit, by huge multi-national organizations. I leave it to you to compare Australia with your own country.

LITERACY

Before talking about what is not working and what is working for literacy in the Australian context, it is necessary to say what I mean by 'literacy'.

There is an infinite range of situations and contexts which make, and will make, demands on people's ability to shape and comprehend meanings couched in the written word. To be able to make and comprehend meaning in any one context is to be literate in that context. Literacy in one context does not ensure literacy in another. It is more accurate to think of a multiplicity of 'literacies' than to speak of a unitary achievement called 'literacy'.

'Literacy' is often used to denote basic functioning where rudimentary decoding and encoding is mastered. This is sometimes termed 'functional literacy'. I believe this to be a potentially confining concept. I prefer to talk about active literacy in whatever context is being considered. By this I mean the ability to inject one's own thoughts and intentions into messages received and sent; the ability to transform and to act upon aspects of the world via the written word.

To function in this way, learners must go much deeper than the coding and encoding of written symbols. Beneath the surface iceberg of this ability is the ability to revise, to arrange and to deploy personal experiences and thoughts, as well as the ability to imagine other people doing the same thing.

Literacy is a fundamental game of our culture which children begin to learn the moment that they are exposed to marks and signs which stand for something else.

WHAT THINGS ARE NOT WORKING FOR LITERACY IN AUSTRALIA?

At the risk of appearing glib I will comment briefly on five things that are not working for literacy :

- formularistic exercise texts and kits
- the media
- experts with solutions
- habits
- national testing.

Formulastic exercise texts and kits.

To my dismay Australian schools are massively stocked with publishers' remedies, catechisms and incantations for literacy. These tend to be based on the notion that teachers will not achieve literacy without the aid of 'literacy food' for children, the equivalent of pre-packaged T.V. dinners with preservatives added. These materials, many of them concocted in the U.S.A. and exported, contain exercise work on parts of language, de-contextualized comprehension rituals, language games and sequenced protocols which purport to increase literacy skills. Some are less toxic than others but, in the main, these materials come between children and authentic (real world) reading and writing. They encourage teachers to consider themselves deficient in knowledge and skills; and they invade schools and their children with cultures and meanings from elsewhere.

Sometimes in some circumstances short term gains appear to be made, especially if the test instrument is based on the materials used, but there is plenty of evidence from research and plain observation to confirm that there are long term negative side effects of such a diet.

Australian children first need to read what is around them in their own culture (local and national) and to write about what concerns them and the people with whom they live. The alienation effect of imported language texts and kits is incalculable but patent to the observer in the glazed eyes of the children who use them. One such text title in Australia has been scored out by children in thousands of classrooms across the nation : "Let's Make English Live" has become "Let's Make English Die".

The Media.

Television and newspapers rarely report good news about literacy. In 1975 the results of a national literacy survey were variously

quoted and misused in the media to feed what I call "the illiteracy scare". Rather than reporting that nine out of ten ten-year-olds could write simple correct sentences, newspapers blazoned the negative :

> "One in ten Australian ten-year-olds unable to write a simple sentence."

In 1980 when the survey was repeated showing marked advances on quite a few scores the argument was advanced that since improvements had been effected during a period when educational funds were being cut back, there is obviously no relation between funding and literacy. A comfortable solution for the politicians.

The effect of the negative press coverage on literacy is to lower teacher morale, to increase uninformed community pressure for "the good old methods" and to create a panic climate in which some of the desperate measures already described are prescribed more out of fear than out of belief.

Teachers are battling against 'big stick' strategies which are on the increase the more unemployment rises : 'Big Sticks' to beat teachers into line; 'big sticks' to diminish and to deny teachers' brain power. You would recognize the slogans :

- "Unemployment results from inability to write job applications"
- "Language exercises and corrected homework - that's what we need"
- "Forget the frills and get back to the 3 R's"
- "Let's have phonics and direct instruction"

The effect, where schools are not strong, is ironically to drive teachers and children away from their own common-sense. It is even more ironic becaue there are strong indicators that more young Australians in the last decade have learnt in common-sense programmes to give voice in writing to what they believe and to make choices in reading which gives them access to the kind of information that increases personal powers.

Experts with solutions.

We need knowledge and information. We need to have access to research

and to inspiration. How and when information is delivered to teachers is a matter of delicacy. Australia is slowly learning not to pour good money down the drain on hit and run visiting gurus and consultants. Advisers are gradually learning that to work long term alongside teachers on the job is better than dispensing 'smart pills'.

Research and my own observations as a consultant indicates that teachers rarely take up gratuitous advice and act concertedly upon it over time.

It is tempting for consultants to give solutions and schemes because teachers often seem to demand answers. But the Australian experience is that teachers so treated tend to become addicted, forever looking for the next guru and the next 'fix'.

This paper explores in some detail an alternative.

Habits.

While there is a good deal of exciting teacher experiment and growth in Australia there is also a huge repressed mountain of established teacher practice contained and shaped by the structures and values of the institution of education. (Some of this is sound teaching; some of it has been shown by research to be harmful.) Most change agents tend to be ineffective in transplanting new ideas into our institutions through which the soothing and settling piped music of custom wafts.

For those who believe that the function of schools is to fit most children to be relatively acquiescent citizens, the phenomenon of habit and inertia in education is not surprising.

My own research has led me to conclude that teachers are not to blame for their failure to take up new ideas based on sound theory. Our teachers and our children are literally framed by the established ideology and structures.

In order to promote effective teaching of literacy we are at war, not against resistant teachers, but against the very substance and

structures of western society.

The difficulty in fighting habits of course is to know which are the bad habits.

National testing.

One could write a book on the current growing hysteria about accountability, standards, minimum competence and 'core' curriculum.

National testing and other forms of standardized testing are political instruments with little educational justification. They do not help teachers to diagnose problems and they do not point the way to a more effective pedagogy. They simply measure, in a crude way, something that they call literacy but which bears little relation to the "active literacy in context" to which I have referred.

While they give no help about how to teach they have a profound effect on what is taught. As is the evaluation so is the curriculum. Thus, as testing of this kind increases in Australia, a likely prognosis, teachers spurred on by the publishing industry, will tend to teach for the tests. What is good will be sacrificed for what appears to be necessary.

WHAT IS WORKING FOR LITERACY IN AUSTRALIA?

I believe that there are some distinct advantages in having centralized education systems. Australian teachers are now supported by state and national official writings which, in my view, represent some enlightenment and wisdom. I call this the Australian orthodoxy and I believe it is working for literacy.

The Australian Orthodoxy.

In 1980, I was part of a national Language Development Project team which had the task of consolidating world-wide wisdom about literacy and putting it in readable form for a national curriculum development

centre pamphlet on language and literacy * (for teachers and the wider community). It was a difficult but pleasurable task; difficult because eventually it had to be censored and endorsed by each Australian state education system; pleasurable because at last, after ten years of fighting for a clearly articulated positive national statement on literacy, I was actually engaged in the historic act of writing it.

Our own voices were altered in the consultation process but most of the ideas survived. For instance, here is my original contribution :

> "Learning to become literate is very much linked with learning to be confident in your own ability to make sense of others and for others. Children who are fearful, lacking in self-respect or ashamed of their own language for some reason, will tend not to use language especially in the presence of those who have the power to judge them. It is crucial to the development of literacy that homes and schools be loving and accepting institutions sensitive to and respectful of the language which each child possesses."

This became, in the pamphlet :

> "Schools should be a place where parents, teachers and children support each other, care about each other, trust each other and want to communicate with each other.
>
> *If there is a strong tendency towards negative comment and the exacting of penalties for errors in language, or for the use of non-standard language in informal talk, children are likely to become cautious and stilted in their language performance. This will impede their language development."*

On the subject of texts and kits the pamphlet contains the following advice :

> "Schools should :
>
> - teach children the patterns and rules of the English language as they use and meet them in their own reading and writing tasks.
>
> *Where an excessive amount of time is spent on grammar in isolation, fragmented language exercises and drills, as opposed to 'on the job' help with writing tasks, the children may be failing to learn their craft even though they get their exercises right.*

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* Language Development Project, Language and Literacy leaflet, Curriculum Development Centre, Canberra, 1980.

- allow children plenty of time for private reading of material especially books which they have chosen for themselves.

  Where there is more use of artificially constructed language laboratories, kits and workcards than the reading of real books and materials, long term progress in reading is likely to be adversely affected."

The following excerpt perhaps best summarizes the message, the spirit and intention of the pamphlet.

> "... the school should be a rich language workshop where children are actively engaged in talking about how it works and in evaluating the quality of what they have done so that they can do it better next time."

It may come as a surprise to you that such a pamphlet could be endorsed and promulgated in every state of Australia as relatively uncontroversial. There have been no media attacks on the document. 100,000 copies have been distributed and it is still heavily in demand by teachers and parents. The profession has stated where it stands and it can support what it says with research and sound theory.

In each of the official state curriculum guides for English and Language Arts, similar orthodoxies are echoed. Our national platform has coherence and internal consistency. It is something solid and refreshing for teachers to test themselves against. It is also an invitation to constructive debate. It has gone a long way to clearing the air and it is a powerful defence weapon for teachers under attack and pressure to do other things. It is also a healthy spur to some schools to consider change.

There is no necessary connection, of course, between what is nationally espoused and what happens in schools. What we have done nationally is to produce an ideal set of generalizations. Teachers, however, have to contend with children and literacy in a context which is in many ways obstructive to change. They need practical theories and plans which will help them to move towards the ideals once they have agreed on those ideals.

TOWARDS A THEORY AND PRACTICE OF TEACHER DEVELOPMENT.

If teachers cannot develop practical working plans, the national orthodoxy will remain a pleasant dream.

It is in this field of teacher action that I believe things are beginning to work for literacy in Australia. This brings me to the central assertion of this paper. To be succinct : teacher power is working for literacy in Australia. Conversely teacher powerlessness is working against literacy.

I now need to make my meaning rich with information and example.

Participants in the two major Australian projects which I shall describe briefly have come to understand that theories of literacy and language development rest on certain views about life, learning and society. The theory implicit in the national pamphlet represents a certain frame of mind which must be taken into account in the quest for literacy. People with a basically different frame of mind will either reject or abuse the principles which the pamphlet endorses.

In the course of two major projects we have learnt two simple things :

1. New practices in the teaching of literacy in schools are doomed to failure if they are applied by teachers who are not changing their frame of mind along with the practice.

2. Projects aimed at changing teachers' minds are similarly doomed if they use methods inconsistent with the learning principles which they espouse.

Our contribution to literacy, then, is not new tests, not new materials, not new ways of teaching teachers how to use new schemes but how to work with teachers to develop their power. Much that I have said in looking at the negative aspects of literacy in Australia can be traced back to a pervasive lack of faith by society and educational administrators

in teachers. Similarly, when one looks at classrooms where active literacy is not being achieved I believe that much of it can be traced back to a lack of teacher faith in children.

What we say about learners of literacy we can also say about teachers learning to 'read' and to act more effectively in their classrooms.

We have come to feel in our bones from experiment, failure, partial success and hard-won experience that teachers learn just as children learn :

- Teachers learn by showing, sharing with each other and by trying things out.
- Teacher learning requires access to demonstrations of that which is to be learnt.
- Those teachers with low self-esteem and a history of powerlessness will learn and grow only as they begin to assert and believe in their own worth.
- Teacher development is best achieved where the subject matter relates to the culture and concerns of the teacher.
- Teachers learn more from consequences than prescriptions.

TWO NATIONAL PROJECTS.

Let me illustrate this with two examples.

The Language and Learning Project.

In 1975 the national Schools Commission funded a Language Across the Curriculum Project in South Australia. Two project officers worked in four secondary schools for two years to support individual teacher inquiry into problematic aspects of language development and learning. There was a quite explicit language development and learning theory underpinning the project (very similar to those outlined above) but in the belief that explicit statements of this theory would pre-empt teacher findings, this was withheld.

Volunteer teachers set up small action-research investigations into such problems as the impermeability of science text books (an experiment with student re-writers of the adult text), the effects of different kinds of assessment on language performance and the effectiveness of peer-to-peer teaching in mathematics. Enquiries were documented and made available to other teachers in the four schools and in the wider system.

The hunch was that teachers would build for themselves explanatory theories, that other teachers on the staff would be drawn into the discussion and speculation and that eventually each school would begin to articulate a "language across the curriculum policy".

Those of us working on the project had designs on the schools in which we worked. We were inspired by a naive view that wisdom similar to ours would ripple out from the inquiring teachers and that our designs would be achieved by means of induction within the school.

This did not happen for various reasons but mainly because we had not made ourselves vulnerable by being explicit and we had not taken sufficient account of the power of custom to neutralise individuals in an institution. We had not built in supports for our inquiring teachers.

But the obvious growth by the participating teachers in articulateness about their own practice, convinced us that certain of our basic principles were sound.

- Teachers learn by enquiry into their own practice.
- Teachers who take risks in critically assessing themselves, will grow in independence and ability to act to overcome problems in their own teaching.
- Teachers doing this kind of work need outside and inside support.

In 1977, this project was taken up by the Education Department of South Australia as the Language and Learning Unit. The model was modified. The unit began to work only in schools were the Principal

and certain senior staff were willing to work with a group of teachers on a project when intentions and goals were negotiated and agreed upon.

The theories, values and beliefs were made much more explicit, not as dogma but as ideas to be tested in practice. Once again the experiments were documented. A teacher network was established so that findings could be shared. Social occasions and conferences were arranged to help bind and support the work. Our newsletters and occasional papers began to fill with teacher writing as the power of writing to liberate the writer and to engage colleagues became more obvious to us.

During the same period three other states of Australia had established similar units working on a similar philosophy of teacher development and a similar view of language learning. We began to share across state boundaries.

In 1978 the work was recognised by the National Curriculum Development Centre which set up a National Working Party on the Role of Language in Learning, comprising all but one state of Australia. The strength of this working party was its Australia-wide network of enquiring teachers and schools. The price of entrance to any language and learning conference was the commitment to undertake an experiment and to write about it. Publications now document this work.

By 1978, we became convinced that a crucial aspect of teacher growth was the building of a personal theory of learning which could then be tested by teachers in their practice in schools. Our conferences worked unremittingly to this end with considerable success. We accumulated evidence that a personally owned learning theory liberates and empowers the teacher. An effective way to language development is to begin with the teacher's learning theory.

More and more we were learning, as teacher developers, that we should 'come clean' about our own beliefs and intentions so that we could be judged as teachers according to our own criteria. We had advanced from our earlier romanticism to the point where we acknowledged and took account of different levels of power, where we recognised political and institutional constraints and where we realised that ideally all contracts

between "change agent" and teacher (or teacher and child) should be negotiated. We were less coy about initiating, challenging and informing, knowing that we were putting our own theories on the line. We became convinced that above all else you teach what you are and what you do. You are the most powerful demonstration of your own theories.

Funding for the national working party ceased in 1980 and the units in all but one Australian state have now been disbanded by the education systems. The work continues under other names and in other projects.

The National Language Development Project.

The second project, the National Language Development Project, took hold as the first project was phasing out. This is an interesting example of a potentially "top down" curriculum intervention project which, by adopting principles of teachers' learning similar to the Language and Learning project, set out to negotiate with systems and teachers, thereby incorporating many of the strengths of a "bottom up" endeavour.

While the politics and history of the project are fascinating, I intend to concentrate on the effects of the project in my own state, South Australia.

Suffice it to say, that the project negotiated tasks with each state, offered a sound theoretical framework for states to consider and provided limited central support for the state developments. The aim was to produce national teacher development and curriculum materials for grades 5 to 8 of schooling.

South Australia opted to work on writing development with a focus on the documentation of "good practice". The theory was that without highly authentic demonstrations of how sound language theories could be put to work in schools, teachers would not be likely to imagine ways in and likely benefits.

The Language Development Project task force of advisers established in South Australia, knew that teachers needed access to the explosion of information on language, much of it iconoclastic in effect, but we also knew that they would not dynamically engage with that information

without concrete demonstration of the practice which was implicit in the information.

By use of the equivalent of grapevines and underground networks, we identified thirty teachers across fifteen schools who were considered, by fairly loose criteria, to be "good" teachers of Language Arts or English. The requirement was not that these teachers could theorise but that they taught "well." The teachers, in negotiation with their Principals, were then invited to join the project knowing that they would be asked to document aspects of their own practice for other teachers. With varying degrees of enthusiasm or suspicion most agreed to be in it supported by a co-ordinator and a group of advisers and consultants.

At a five-day residential conference, the teachers and the task force, hammered out a set of goals, strategies and understandings, not without tension, and then individuals set about documenting, as a base-line, one aspect of their present teaching, which they considered to be of possible interest to other teachers. Even though these were in effect hand-picked 'stars', there was a high degree of humility, self-doubt and, in some cases, fear amongst the teachers. Most were absolute novices in the business of writing about education in their own classrooms and a good many entered into quite extreme manifestations of avoidance behaviour. They faced the truth of Donald Graves's assertion that authentic writing is an advanced form of strip tease.

Writing for one's local peers is challenging enough without the added awe of addressing the nation in a pioneering language development project. But project leaders insisted that the task be completed even if the writing never reached an audience. Support was available for those who wanted to talk through their writing difficulties. With no precedents and no models, finding a voice and a format was problematic. Yet they all made it, after many drafts and heartburns, and their work has been subsequently published in draft in three volumes, WRITE ON, I, II and III.*

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* Despite the range of background, age and teaching experience of the writers it is interesting to note the conclusions about them of a cognitive psychologist, Dr. J. Biggs, who was commissioned to examine the L.D.P. materials to assess the match between espoused L.D.P. theory and teacher writing : "The WRITE ON series thus conveys a strong impression of theoretical unanimity and an innovative array of classroom practice that give practical expression to the common theoretical stance." "Assumptions about learning contained in the L.D.P." J. Biggs, Unpublished Paper, Curriculum Development Centre, 1981.

Teacher response to these materials across the nation has been quite overwhelming.

The South Australian project teachers realized that they were not only literate with respect to this language task but that through print, they had become valued public property. A mild form of panic followed. The writing and reflection on their own practice, as predicted by the teacher development principles upon which we were working, had led them to develop some articulate theories about their own practice. But it also exposed unsettling contradictions and absurdities. Their practice was not nearly good enough. The teachers almost unanimously asked for input, access to information, research data and the writing of experts. With such information at their command they planned for the next stage in which each individual undertook an experiment into some aspect of writing. Reflection on their own practice plus new information led them to seek improvement.

They decided in 1981 to become self-supporting groups commissioning input. They had recognized the loneliness and precariousness of individual work. In groups in 1981 and 1982 they have gone from strength to strength producing very powerful and effective materials which will allow other teachers to repeat the process which has made them strong.*

The Language Development Project model had more chance than the Language and Learning model because it was, for a while at least, blessed by the Federal Government, because it worked at all levels to make room for change (classroom, community, state education system, national system), because it aimed at production of tools which could be taken up by

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* Kevin Piper, the national evaluator of the project writes of this feature of the project :

"... there is also a growing sense in which, through the process, the ownership of the Project is becoming vested in the actors. This growing sense of 'ownership' among project participants in turn has produced a growing sense of commitment and involvement, and a growing sense of involvement. The open-ended, exploratory element likewise contributes an air of uncertainty, and sometimes an impression of inaction; but it is also contributing towards the building of a solid foundation of understanding on which practice can be based and on which theory can be modified." ("Evaluating a National Curriculum Project" in English in Australia, no. 58, December 1981.)

other teachers and because it offered specific demonstrations of practice to its clients. It also gathered and gave access to the best of what is currently known. But both projects at the core rested on the major assumptions that teachers must come to feel their own power to act according to their own hard-won theories. In order for this to happen, change agents and participating power figures (hierarchically speaking) must demonstrate their own fidelity to this tenet. They have to demonstrate what they espouse in their own actions. They also have to be able to negotiate. In such a model there is no room for patronizing 'help' or 'facilitation'. All participants have to be bona fide co-workers and learners, each vulnerable in his or her own sphere. Each participant has to be willing to make a stand and be open to scrutiny. Conflict, contradiction and resolution are essential elements. Struggling teachers, strengthened by such a process, will teach children to struggle productively. This is what novices in the quest for increasing literacy must learn above all else. Thus, some of us are becoming wiser.

In assessing the quality of a literacy programme, look to the demonstrations, the enactments of the teachers in living and teaching There can be no easy grafting of new methods and ideas onto teachers. People who accept grafts are likely to be powerless functionaries who will teach powerless functioning (not to mention grafting).

Towards the end of 1980, the Minister of Education announced that the national Curriculum Development Centre (and with it the Language Development Project) would be disbanded by June 1982. As Kevin Piper * the national evaluator of the Language Development Project says :

> "The irony is that the L.D.P. may well have succeeded in pioneering a model of national curriculum development genuinely suited to the peculiarly difficult Australian context at a time when the concept of national curriculum development itself is being abandoned."

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* Piper, K. "Evaluating a National Curriculum Project" in English in Australia, no. 58, December 1981.

Other Australian Work.

In speaking of only three Australian initiatives, I do not wish you to leave with the impression that this is all. If I had time I would love to expand on the 'hands on' work of people like Michael Dilena and Brian Cambourne in tertiary institutions, on Stephen Harris' and Michael Christies' pioneering work in the Aboriginal schools in the Northern Territory, the growing collaboration in teacher support between national associations (Australian Association for the Teaching of English, Australian Reading Association, Primary English Teaching Association, Australian Applied Linguistics Association) and on many other "action research" type projects now gathering strength across the nation. They all have in common the belief that in any act of learning the locus of control must be with the learner if we are to promote growing independence and personal power. This applies both to children learning to read and to write and to their teachers.

But I do not wish to depict Australia as the great south land of promise and insight. As indicated earlier in this paper, we share struggles similar to yours and we despair as often as we struggle.

In closing however, I wish to rise above despair. I prefer to be constructive, and slightly cosmic. In summary I offer for your consideration a synthesis of some developing ideas which may eventually warrant the status of universals in the quest for literacy.

SOME FEATURES OF A UNIVERSAL PROGRAMME FOR LITERACY

A MODEST PROPOSAL

SOME BASIC VIEWS ABOUT LEARNING AND LITERACY

(Implicit in the pamphlet on language and learning - see Bibliography.)

- The human being is a born scientist, actively processing the world and inducing 'rules'.
- Humans learn interactively and collaboratively by showing, sharing and trying things out.
- Human learning requires access to accomplished demonstrations of that which is to be learnt.
- Literacy is learnt in use when it has purpose for the learner (when there is intention to learn).
- The aim of literacy is to produce increasing independence and ability to act on the part of the learner.
- Those with low self-esteem and a history of powerlessness will achieve active literacy only as they begin to assert and believe in their own worth.
- Literacy is best achieved where the meaning being made relates to the culture and concerns of the learner.
- Skills and information offered at the point of need are more effective than skills and information taught separately from the act.
- Human beings learn best when they own the problem.
- Human beings learn more from consequences than prescriptions.

At the base of all these views, I suggest that there is a formula :

group/personal power + intention/purpose +
information (access to demonstration) ⟶
learning ⟶ more group/personal power.

Such a view of learners and learning values sharing, working together, acting and transforming. It is for dynamism, change and reconstruction. It is non-determinist and non-behaviourist in its orientation.

FEATURES OF A LITERACY PROGRAMME IN SCHOOLS

(Becoming confirmed and made explicit in the work of project teachers in Australia)

If : group/personal power + intention/purpose + information/access to demonstration ⟶ learning

then teaching for literacy will need to have at least the following features :

- genuine belief by the teacher in the power of the learner's head
- engagement with meanings arising out of and related to the cultural, socio/political reality of the learners (cf. Friere's work)
- emphasis on production and use
- demonstration, thinking aloud, and on the spot information delivered by the teacher when commissioned by the learner (either implicitly or explicitly)
- where possible, rich exposure to and immersion in a community of readers and writers who share and talk about their craft (the classroom itself will be a supportive community of apprentice readers and writers)
- access to inspiring examples of mature reading and writing (and ideally to those who produced it) to help learners to imagine what it is that they might eventually seek to be and do and why this might be pleasurable
- encouragement of the learners (by example) to induce rules and patterns (to build their own emerging theories) about what they read and write
- pervasive valuing of, if not insistence upon, tenacity, question asking, risk taking and imagination
- access to explicit demonstrations of consequences following as closely as possible after the literacy act.

FEATURES OF PROJECTS AND TEACHER DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMMES

(Drawn from the experiences of the Language and Learning and Language Development Projects)

Because teachers teach what they are and what they can do, a 'universal' teacher development programme would aim to ensure that teachers learn to :

- negotiate with and defend themselves against those in authority over them
- read and write for a variety of purposes and theorize about their own comprehending and composing processes, and about the complexities of each act within its context
- articulate their own developing theory of learning, and of language learning in particular
- give access to what they presently think about reading, writing (and anything else for that matter)
- analyse constraints and taboos that operate and where necessary make compromises but not capitulations
- reflect upon their own performance and invite others to do the same
- ask questions, seek advice, or find demonstrations in areas of personal puzzlement, dissonance or anxiety
- say "I don't know" when this is so
- contradict and provide frank appraisals with respect
- evaluate information, research data, and opinion in the light of their own principles
- try things our systematically to see if they work
- apply Kelly's first law of psychology :

  "When in doubt, ask the clients"

THE 'FRONTS' ON WHICH WORKERS FOR LITERACY MUST FIGHT

Because any of these plans for children, teachers and change agents can be aborted by ruling ideologies and structures, any literacy programme must also try to address the following influences and constraints in order to make room for the main actors to operate :

- local and national assessment/evaluation instruments and diganostic tools must be challenged to value those things which are consistent with desired theory and practice
- local and national education councils, funding agencies and political leaders must be provided with evidence (and voter pressure) that sound educational theory works in practice
- parents and the wider community must be informed, shown and convinced that the programme 'works'
- publishers of materials which run counter to the knowledge, processes and values of the programme must come under pressure from teachers, education systems and parents
- official local, state and national education curriculum policy statements, guidelines and instruction manuals should endorse and legitimate the tenets of the programme
- school boards and Principals must come to value the programme and appreciate the need for some school structures, habits and rules which impede the programme to be altered
- teachers' unions and associations should be helped to understand and to endorse the programme and, if necessary, to be convinced to take action to secure it
- media mythologies need to be effectively challenged and corrected
- teacher educators should provide under-graduate and graduate courses in keeping with the programme
- children, if necessary, must be helped to unlearn expectations of schooling and teacher requirements, methods and rules incompatible with the tenets of the programme

CONCLUSION

Finally, if you ask me, it is all about power and the struggle by individuals and groups to win some space and control. But consideration of constraints can so easily lead to despair. It is much more constructive to look at how much we have won (and why) by struggling over the past twenty years.

As some of my colleagues noted in a recent position paper on writing :

> "Despite constraints, teachers still largely rule in their own classrooms, and where one rules one can make changes." (Cook et al, p.31)

Change requires courage. In Australia, we are backing teachers to make a difference.

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